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AN EDUCATIONAL REFORMER.¹

THE reception accorded this volume has not been uniformly sympathetic. The subject of the memoir did not live in the public eye. His character was far removed from the conventional type which claims posthumous recognition in the shape of an official biography. His achievements, even in the field of education, were certainly not great enough to warrant his becoming a prey to the notoriety that pursues a man who has made some signal success. All this may fairly be granted to orthodox criticism, which resents a new claimant for its suffrages. Yet one cannot but be glad, after reading Quick's life, that many who never heard his name before and who can still confess their ignorance without shame, have been introduced by its pages to an attractive personality of no common sort.

Fortunately the writer intrusted with the task of presenting a picture of a man of such unique temperament has not followed the lines of an ordinary biography. The present volume could not be better arranged as a memorial of one whose life was not cast in a common mold. The editor, Mr. Storr, a lifelong friend, has been loyal enough to harmonize his biographical methods with the peculiar traits of the subject of his memoir. Quick's temperament was desultory and irregular in its impulses, and the arrangement of the pages of his memoir reflects in a very effective way these characteristic traits. Without chronological sequence or logical connection they give us the thoughts of a mind delicately organized, with a singular gift of originality, in words jotted down from time to time as the occasion prompted. For Quick was in the habit of keeping what might be called an intellectual log book, capable of furnishing attractive and stimulating extracts from true personal records. The

¹THE LIFE AND REMAINS OF R. H. QUICK. Edited by F. Storr. New York and London: The Macmillan Company. 1899.

editor thus had abundant material to draw from, and he has certainly succeeded in bringing out on almost every page something that attests Quick's powers of observation and reflection. As a matter of fact the actual biography hardly covers more than a fifth of the volume, the remainder of which consists of excerpts from Quick's diaries, taken directly as they must stand in the original manuscripts, and without attempt at systematic classification. This is all as it should be, for the book could under no circumstances appeal to a large public, while those persons who do read it will be grateful to Mr. Storr that he has done no violence to Quick's words by placing them under restrictions and conditions alien to every instinct of his nature.

Very little is told us of Quick's early years. He was not precocious, so the records of his youth are given in less than half a dozen pages. Born in 1831 in London, he received the kind of education and training that the ordinary middle-class Englishman gets. His father was a London merchant comfortably well to do. The certainty of a competency not dependent on his own efforts undoubtedly produced in Quick a readiness to follow the caprices of his fancy to the complete sacrifice of his own material welfare. This may not have been a misfortune for him, since to a man of his temperament the obligation of following an occupation of routine labor might have been fatal to the development of the finer sensibilities of his nature.

At Harrow he had as fellow-students Butler and Calverly, whose names became in different ways well known to the public. His career both at school and at Cambridge seems to have been uneventful, illness interfering with the possibility of academic success. His voluminous diaries contain almost no reference to this formative period. It can be well understood that he looked back on the time spent at grinding on mathematics at Trinity College with no degree of satisfaction. Visits to the Continent had made him proficient in modern languages, but his knowledge of these was not scientific in the philological sense, his interests lying rather on the literary side. In this direction his university

work could give him no assistance, nor can the impulse to what he afterwards accomplished as a pioneer in educational theory be looked for in these college days.

After receiving the amount of academic distinction appropriate to one who worked seriously at a subject which failed entirely to excite his interest, Quick emerged from Cambridge, and, like multitudes of other graduates, took holy orders. A half century ago almost every one who had no taste for the medical or legal professions, unless he were strongly anti-religious, did exactly what Robert Hebert Quick did. As his biographer points out, no one could pretend that his motives for undertaking ministerial work were due to any such call as prompted men like Pusey and Newman to "see in the clerical profession the one and only worthy pursuit in life."

It would not be necessary to make an apologetic comparison of this nature had not ungenerous criticism questioned Quick's sincerity in selecting his career. He was comfortably off. His nature was twisted in no direction by unworthy ambition. His attitude toward religious matters is constantly revealed in his journals, and nothing could be freer from cant. His nature was deeply impressed by the reality of spiritual things. Simply because his temperament did not fit him, or rather because he fancied it did not fit him, for the work of a parish priest is no ground for casting reflections on his motives for accepting ordination in the Church of England. As a schoolmaster he may be said also to have failed. But no one would think on that account of denying his devotion to the cause of education.

After his ordination he became a curate without stipend in an East End parish. It is characteristic that his good nature and sympathy should have caused him at the very start to work among the poor. It is equally characteristic that he soon felt impelled to give up parish work for an educational career. From what is reported by those associated with him he was by no means a failure. There was much in his nature which admirably fitted him for just this type of clerical duty. But he already evinced that impatience of results

which produced that unstableness, so mysterious to his friends, which crops out time and time again in his after life. His lack of self-confidence was coupled with a strange miscalculation of the "*vis inertiae*" in human nature. So, looking on educational work as offering a relief from the difficulties of an active life, with its soul-disturbing problems, he turned to teaching.

His first experience hardly convinced him that his choice was a wise one. He had left his London parish to become mathematical master in a school at Guildford, because he seemed to himself to be "doing no good there, and getting very idle." Idleness was certainly not to plague him in his new situation, but before long he had thoughts of seeking another curacy. He complained of monotony and routine, and soon shook off the traces, calculating that the sum total of benefit he derived was a better understanding of the character of boys. "My intercourse," he tells us, "on the whole, raised them in my estimation, and increased my liking for them."

He also learned to have a supreme contempt for common educational methods. He embarked on his teaching adventure with something of the reformer's spirit; but, brought into contact with human nature in its undeveloped state, he was all the more convinced that what he was doing as a fixture in the machinery of a school was partly ineffectual and partly harmful. In fact he was hardly built in the way to command success either as a subordinate or as a principal in a school. Apart from his disappointment at seeing no chance for applying his views on educational reform, what can be said of a prospective educator of youth who had so little of the infallible dictator in him as to say in speaking of juvenile morality: "Lying, indeed, did come under my notice, but so, also, did many instances of truthfulness when truth was inconvenient and dangerous."

Quick had often visited the Continent before, but now apparently he went there with the serious purpose of learning something of secondary education in France and Germany. He was a keen observer of what fell in his way. His criti-

cisms of Matthew Arnold's well-known writings on the school systems of the Continent indicate that he penetrated beneath the surface of pedagogical literature and watched as a sympathetic but discriminating observer the actual working of these school systems. Of the years which fall between his temporary retirement from teaching and his return to it again we are given very little information in the fragments from the journal. But undoubtedly in the five years from 1860 on he was laying the foundation for his work on *Educational Reformers* which appeared in the early seventies. What he read and observed during this period did not tend to make him accept English educational methods in any less critical mind than in the few months of his novitiate. More definite and better-informed convictions seemed to have encouraged him, however, to make another trial. Probably he now felt that he could not only criticise but offer some positive programme of reform.

The latter part of 1867 found him assistant master at Cranleigh School. He soon exchanged this post for what seemed a better place at Hurstpierpoint. Things went smoothly for a time, but he speedily became conscious of the deadening effect of scholastic work in a small isolated community. "The thoughts and interests of the masters were hardly more extended than those of the boys, and in the dearth of other topics men devote their leisure to making elaborate studies of each other's defects." A misunderstanding between the head master and his staff, in which Quick became involved, naturally made his sensitive nature all the more open to the trying side of school routine.

Whatever may have been his relations to his superior or to his fellow-masters it is certain that he endeared himself to his students, one of whom contributes some delightful reminiscences: "It seems to me that everybody loved him and valued his good opinion, and that nobody could have dreamed of deliberately vexing him"—"more than twenty years ago and yet the picture is scarcely blurred: the cheery voice, the kind, eager face, the long growth of red beard, even the white flannels and the gray shirt."

We can hardly wonder that he entered with the fullest sympathy into the human side of school life when we read of his performing a flogging experiment on himself in order to be able to judge of the effects of this kind of punishment. "I found the pain I gave myself far more than I expected; and as I had treated myself indulgently, I feared I had often given a far more severe punishment than I had intended. My practice, therefore, for the future was much modified by the single flagellation. I wish we could more often put ourselves in the place of our pupils, and so learn or suffer what we require of them."

It did not take long to convince him that his period of usefulness at Hurstpierpont was over. He left after a stay of three months—certainly a ridiculously short time either to test his own success or the efficiency of the school. The next year was a fruitful one, for it saw the publication of "Educational Reformers." We have already spoken of the continental experience which gave the impulse to its production. "I have found," he writes, "that in the history of education not only good books but all books are in German or some other foreign language." His own work was to serve as a kind of bait to induce English schoolmasters to learn something of foreign models by opening up a new vista of educational methods. The book was by no means theoretical, and reflected the open-mindedness of its author, who reduced himself to the role of interpreting Comenius, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi. Like Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus," the book found a most appreciative public among trans-Atlantic English-speaking people, while Quick experienced the prophet's fate in his own country. As a business venture it was a complete failure, but Quick met this misfortune with composure. Later he was gratified to find its popularity on the increase at home, and he supplied the demand there with customary disregard for his material interests by importing the pirated American edition and disposing of it at cost price. But "Educational Reformers" brought him at least into public notice. Early in 1869 he received an appointment to a mastership in modern languages at Harrow,

being surprised and flattered to be invited to the place where he himself had been trained and where his old schoolfellow, Butler, was now head master. These associations, and the contrast to the small schools where he had previously worked, all contributed to make him feel that he was about to get into an atmosphere where he could do effectual work. All looked roseate at the outset. "Yesterday the sight of the whole school assembled in the Speech Room was to me not only pleasurable but something more too."

But nearer acquaintance with his work and his surroundings eliminated the effect of these pleasurable impressions. He had already by taste and by study acquired a strong distrust of English educational methods, and it is strange that he ever fancied he could be satisfied to work in a great public school, the very incarnation of the principles he criticised. His journals speak constantly of headaches. They may have been rather the effect than the cause of the mental depression under which he labored during the four years of his connection with Harrow.

It seems plain that he overworked himself. Here is the schedule of his day: "Down at 6; worked at Prendergast and French construing till school at 7:30; breakfast, 9:15 to 9:45; then maps, exercises, etc., till 12 o'clock; school; from 1:45 to 3, French construing and compose German exercise; from 3 to 4:30, in school; 4:30 to 5:30, looking over exercises; 5:30 to 6:30, Cæsar lesson; 8 to 10:30, looking over German exercises."

This is certainly an appalling record. "No wonder," he exclaims, "I am like a line turning a wheel in a mine." The fact is he was over-conscientious and was no economizer of time. He still believed in teaching. But those about him he regarded as "exactors of work" and not teachers. The world of the masters and the world of the boys were far apart. Neither understood the other. A great public school only presented him with the old problems on a larger scale, associated with a dead mass of conventionalism which stood in the way of improvement. His sole satisfaction was the consciousness that he had a "fair hold on boys," and his

constant consolation was "books about teaching—they took my life up into a clearer and brighter atmosphere."

Regretted by his associates, he gave up what most men would have regarded as an enviable position, generally the stepping-stone to substantial advancement in his profession. This record of experiments ending only in failure becomes normal. In 1876 he acquired a small preparatory school in London. Here for four years he watched its numbers decrease from twenty to minute proportions. He tried the country with no better success. He was now advancing toward the age when even his magnificent optimism could not disguise from him the truth. "Everybody seems to unite in assuring me that I am not of the slightest use, and can't and shan't be." Even his appointment at Cambridge to a lectureship on education brought disillusionment. He did not merit the small number of the audience—once there were but four present and those ladies. He remembered as his most successful lecture one given at Westminster to half a dozen people. But nobody cared about the subject. Those who came were hardly the material on which he wished to work—"schoolgirls"—and he felt dreadfully tried in his consciousness of the entire lack of appreciation of what he had to say.

In 1883 he was glad to escape from a life passed under "conditions similar to a London tramp," in which terms he describes the head-mastership of his small country school, by accepting at the hands of his college a living in the north of England. He looked forward to more leisure for reading, and in addition to the parish work, for which his genial nature gave him undeniable qualifications, there were a grammar school and parochial schools to enable him to keep in touch with practical education. He found, however, that the schools brought him into unpleasant personal conflicts with his parishioners, who, in their sturdy Yorkshire independence, resented his reforming ideas. Besides, Church work itself burdened him with the unending succession of minutiae which he was too conscientious to neglect. So in 1887 he resigned his charge and went to live in a pleasant suburban

district within easy reach of London. Here he found his occupation at last after years of restlessness and change. It had taken him a long time to discover that his real usefulness lay entirely outside the limits of what he had so often taken up and abandoned.

He stimulated others to more faithful, more earnest devotion to teaching. He himself understood better than they its conditions and its problems, but had failed from purely temperamental reasons to make use of what he knew. Surrounded by his books, always approachable to his wide circle of friends, always ready to assist those interested in his favorite study, he passed the remaining four years of his life in quiet usefulness. His faith in the cause to which he devoted himself never wavered. Keenly distrustful of himself, he yet never questioned that his confidence in a real science of education was well placed. It is this unflagging interest, associated with a most extraordinary capacity for seeing all sides of a subject, which ought to make Quick's journal a *vade mecum* for the teacher. He had no system. He was too close to nature's complexities to systematize what he observed. But his own failures bore more fruit than the successes of most men, and his name will not soon be forgotten as the worthy compeer of those educational reformers about whom he wrote with such single-hearted interest.

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